

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA San Diego, California

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

***For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U. S. Attorney Michael Kaplan (619-557-5101)
or Assistant U.S. Attorney Carol Lee (619-557-6235)***

For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - May 28, 2004

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced the conviction yesterday in United States District Court in San Diego, of six individuals on drug trafficking charges arising from their presence on a drug-laden vessel stopped in the ocean near Costa Rica. A federal jury returned verdicts late Thursday afternoon, following a three-week trial, convicting Luis Ferne Olave-Valencia, Rene Al Chavarin-Carrillo, Aquilino Bonilla-Torres, Jose Elvi Mosquera, Jose Rebolledo-Estupinan, and Sofonias Riascos-Riascos of one count of conspiracy to possess 2,245 kilograms/4,939 pounds of cocaine with intent to distribute on board a vessel and one count of possession of cocaine (2,245 kilograms/4,939 pounds) with intent to distribute on board a vessel.

The charges of which defendants, five of whom are from Columbia and one of whom is from Mexico, were found guilty arose from events that occurred on September 13, 2003. On that day the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton was on patrol in international waters off the coast of Costa Rica. During this patrol, a Customs C-130 aircraft came across a suspected "go-fast" boat approximately 180 nautical miles from the

Hamilton. The “go-fast” had no markings and no flag to indicate registry. The Hamilton launched a helicopter and the helicopter crew observed the “go-fast” and a second vessel tied up together for approximately twenty minutes. When the boats separated, the helicopter continued to monitor the “go-fast.” The helicopter crew eventually announced its presence and signaled the “go-fast” crew to stop. A chase ensued and the Coast Guard helicopter crew observed the “go-fast” crew jettisoning bales over the sides of the boat. Despite signals and commands from the helicopter crew telling the “go-fast” to stop, the crew refused. After a pursuit of approximately five minutes, the helicopter crew successfully disabled the engines of the “go-fast.” The Hamilton then launched a boarding team and the team picked up 99 bales of cocaine floating in the water in the vicinity of the “go-fast.”

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Carol Lee and Michael Kaplan, who prosecuted the case, defendants are scheduled to appear before the Honorable Barry Ted Moskowitz for sentencing on September 14, 2004, at 9:00 a.m.

This case was a product of the coordinated efforts of the San Diego Maritime Task Force comprised of the United States Coast Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

DEFENDANTS

Luis Ferne Olave-Valencia
Rene Al Chavarin-Carrillo
Aquilino Bonilla-Torres
Jose Elvi Mosquera
Jose Rebolledo-Estupinan
Sofonias Riascos-Riascos

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 46, U.S.C., App., Sec 1903(a)(c) and (j) - Conspiracy to possess cocaine with intent to distribute a controlled substance on board a vessel

Title 46, U.S.C., App., Sec. 1903(a), (c)(1)(A) and (f) - Possession of cocaine with intent to distribute on board a vessel and Title 18, U.S.C., App., Sec. 2 - Aiding and abetting

Maximum penalty per count: mandatory minimum term of 10 years to life; fine of \$4,000,000; five years of supervised release.

AGENCIES

U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement